

acquaintances to know that they had real friends in us and that when they needed help, we would be there for them. Mother helped us discover not just the importance of hard work, but the joy of it as well. She taught us the magic of the early hours of the morning for accomplishment. She often told us that those who are up early 'run ahead all day.'

"Mother instilled in us a love for all good books. She could recite poetry by the hour. One of my most vivid memories is standing on the wood box while Mother and I did the dishes. She would recite poetry and would tell us wonderful stories with great morals. From my Mother we learned that there is no joy to equal that of serving others and forgetting oneself."

## Midway is

### An Artistic Community

Midway serves as the home for Robert Duncan's family, but also for his art studio and worldwide print business. He represents the latest in a long tradition of artists who have chosen Midway as a focal spot for their works.

Robert Duncan was born in Salt Lake City in 1952 and grew up in a large family of ten children. He spent the summers helping his grandparents on the cattle ranch in Wyoming. It was surrounded by beautiful open country

and he fell in love with the rural lifestyle. Robert drew constantly from the age of five, and when he was eleven, his grandmother gave him his first set of paints and paid for his first art lessons. He studied art at the University of Utah and worked as a commercial artist before devoting full time efforts in creating his own unique style of American West fine art.

"The summers I spent on the Duncan farm affected me deeply," said Robert recently. "Those times taught me the value of nature, of work and of family. I get a bit sad to think that so few of today's children can have those experiences. The world is changing much too fast. But I believe we can save the things that matter most, if our hearts are there. Simple things have such profound value. We all need a loving home, family, fresh air, and clean water. We all need to dig a little dirt, plant a few seeds and know the miracle of the harvest."

"Through my paintings I try to celebrate these things I treasure, the things I feel bring the most lasting joy. Linda and I have lived in Midway for the past twenty-five years and have enjoyed the blessing of raising our six children in this beautiful valley. Life in this special place has been the inspiration for much of my art."

Over the years the spectacular scenery and natural beauty of Midway have drawn

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artists to its valley. The following three biographical sketches are representative of the earliest artists who were captivated by Midway and what they saw there:

John Hafen, 1856 - 1910

John Hafen was born in Scherzingen, Canton Thurgau, Switzerland in 1856. His family were converts to the Mormon faith and immigrated to Utah Territory in 1868. Hafen's early artistic talent was recognized by George Ottinger and Dan Weggeland. In 1882 John began his LDS mission in Switzerland where he befriended and baptized many converts, including Gottlieb Kohler, in the Bernese Oberland.

In 1890 Hafen and several other young Utah artists convinced the LDS Church authorities to sponsor the "French Art Mission." This was an opportunity for Hafen and the others to study at the Academie Julian in Paris. The group returned to paint murals and paintings for the LDS temples under construction.

John Hafen visited many of his Swiss friends in Midway and frequently painted landscapes in the nearby mountains. He also became acquainted with Eliza Van Wagoner Hair, the local Midway photographer, who received instructions for her glass-plate

cameras from him. In return she taught Hafen her specialized technique for hand-coloring photographs.

In a letter to Eliza, Hafen wrote, "So here we are, trusting in God for divine aid, while we diligently and earnestly apply ourselves to study and grasp everything pertaining to art. Our trust in God has not been in vain. He has blessed us abundantly, so that our progress is much greater than it could possibly be by dependence only upon our own mental strength."

Joseph Kerby, 1857-1911

Originally from Sheffield, England Kerby settled in Wasatch County and painted many scenes of Provo Canyon and the surrounding mountains. He and John Hafen also created background scenery for the dramatic productions in the Midway Opera House and later the Bonner Amusement Hall. Kerby was also an actor in the performances.

One of the skills that Kerby had was the ability to mix business with pleasure. While working at Schneitter's Hot Pots in June 1891, Kerby and his painting assistants spent their evening hours studying their lines for the theatrical production of Green Bushes just opening in Heber. (Wasatch Wave, June 16, 1891)



Joseph Kerby was also well-known for his fancy painting or faux wood and marble painting used in the mantle pieces and furniture in some of the larger homes of the Wasatch County area. This artistic technique of replicating the beautiful wood grain patterns of hardwood and fruitwood onto local pine or fir was in great demand. Kerby also created with paints the intricate marble stone look for interior finishes. As an artist he came first to published notice when a painting of his was raffled successfully in 1890 for a local benefit in Heber. Kerby continued painting landscapes and some fine still-life work until his death in 1911.

#### Jacob A. Bigler, 1849-1920

Swiss-born John Bigler studied art in Paris before immigrating to America. After joining the U.S. Army he was sent to the Utah Territory to fight in the Indian wars in the 1860s. Later he joined the Mormon faith and married two Mormon girls and settled in Midway. While supporting his families by farming, Bigler painted many of the beautiful local scenes.

A number of later Midway artists followed professional art careers. They include: Verna Berg, Paul Kuhni, Karl Probst, Richard and Boyd Van Wagoner, Ferrin and Bill

Whitaker.

The artistic community in Midway remains alive and well. During recent interviews local artists made the following comments:

#### A. Valoy Eaton:

"In 1971 we moved to the beautiful Midway area and settled in our home on River Road. As a full-time artist I painted the picturesque sites along the Provo River Bottoms and also the valley landscapes. I also painted the people around me—the farmers and ranchers who were my neighbors. As an artist, I enjoyed tremendously the opportunity to observe the people, landscapes, wildlife, and mountain scenery in the Midway area and tried to respond with my work as best as I could. Looking back now, I very much enjoyed my years in Midway trying to capture the natural beauty of its surroundings and its people."

#### David & Sherry Omans

"Years ago my husband and I would drive up to Midway from Salt Lake City to paint. At the time we held full time jobs to support ourselves while we were part time artists. After years of traveling up and down the canyon, we decided to live here permanently and establish our gallery. We have now been painting full time for more than twenty years. David and

I both love to portray the Midway landscapes in an 'impressionistic style.' We renovated this historic pot rock building on Main Street and opened the Edelweiss Gallery in 1995.

"Originally this was the Thomas Hair Barbershop and Confectionery store built in the 1890s next door to the Bonner Amusement Hall (later the Midway Social Hall). Henry Coleman used to come in while we were remodeling and tell us wonderful stories of how the earlier owners would sell soft drinks and treats to those dancing in the hall next door through an opening cut in the adjoining walls."

#### George Olsen

George Olsen is both an artist and an architect who has lived in Midway for the last several years. He has designed many beautiful Swiss-motivated buildings and most recently the "Legacy Bridge" which spans the Provo River. George is considered one of a few remaining true pen and ink artists using the old method of crow quill pen and India ink. Ruth Olson, his wife, has painted many of the Swiss-dancing figures featured on several local buildings.

"After many years living and working in Europe and other areas of the United States, Ruth and I decided to move to Midway to raise

our six daughters and enjoy the unmatched beauty of this area. I devote equal time now to my architectural work and developing a unique style of printing my works using the 'Giclee' medium on hand-made paper. This is an area that is an artist's dream and we feel blessed to live here and to be associated with the people of Midway, who have become our friends."

#### Al Rounds

"Midway has been a family experience for Nancy and me and our seven children for many years. In fact, as I look back over the thirty plus years that we have enjoyed the sights, sounds, and smells of Midway, they really have it right—their consistent focus on the family.

"Midway has always been a safe place for us to take our seven children, even when they were small, and just let them wander around while Nancy and I tried to sell a painting or two at the Swiss Days Festival or while I was trying to capture the beauty of the landscape or the historic architecture.

"It must have been in the early 1980s, after I had graduated from the University of Utah in 1979 and had decided to try to earn a living as a full time artist, the Midway Swiss Days festival became even more important to us. During those days there were only about



two art galleries in Salt Lake City and they were very hard to get into as a young artist. The Swiss Days event gave me opportunities to not only display and sell my art, but also to connect with the family-oriented people that have become my own bread-and-butter clients.

"Those of us who were really "working class artists," who chose to paint on a full time basis without the backup of teaching positions, really came to depend on the increasing crowds that came up to Midway on the Labor Day weekend. Here we could really connect on a one-on-one level with the people who were interested in our art. For me personally it was very important to have the opportunity for people to greet me, shake my hand, and be introduced to Nancy or other members of our family who were there to set up and sell my artwork. It was a chance for me to "touch and feel" the pulse of the public who were interested in my style of art.

"Those were the days that I struggled to establish myself as a serious Utah artist, who wanted to live in Utah, raise a family in Utah, and capture the spirit of the people and places in Utah. To this day I can remember setting up my booth in Midway with all of the paintings that I had worked on for the whole summer. In those days I would sell my originals, not prints

mind you, for anywhere from \$25 to \$75 a piece. And these were framed as well!

"Being in the Swiss Days event each year was a wonderful tradition for our family that continues right to this very day. We will be there again this year. The festival has been a way for me to gain exposure to people in a very direct way. It has been like a TV commercial for my work, but on a very affordable basis. As a family we cherish the memories and personal relationships we have made over more than 30 years."

## Conclusion

After nearly 150 years the people of Midway continue to exhibit their indomitable spirit in the face of new challenges. As the early settlers faced the problems of poor soils and a short growing season, today's Midway residents face the challenges of population growth and dependency on a tourism-based economy. The early settlers were not daunted by a lack of rich gold and silver-ores and an abundance of "pot rock" deposits. They used the available timber to shore up the mine tunnels in Park City and found innovative uses for their unique stone as construction material for a magnificent Town Hall built as a communal, public works project. They developed the "worthless hot springs and

unproductive land" into recreation resorts that have outlasted the mining boom years.

Today the citizens of Midway continue to draw on their long-standing traditions of volunteerism and cooperation. Thousands of townspeople turn out to serve and help in one of the largest, most successful annual celebrations in the West. Now in its 56<sup>th</sup> year, the Swiss Days celebration represents more than a tribute to one of many cultural heritages. It personifies the welcoming spirit of Midway and its people—no matter the root of their ancestry, the denomination of their faith, or the length of their residency.

This has been a story of courage, faith and determination to succeed. It reflects the sheer will of generations of the human family to overcome the difficulties of their day. We have seen the impact of war, depression, prosperity, growth, and change on the lives of the people of Midway. We have heard the words of just a few of those who experienced these epochs of history, but they represent thousands of additional eyewitnesses.

This story began with the 1999 discovery of Eliza Van Wagoner Hair's glass-plate photographic negatives after being hidden for nearly a century. Her keen eye and skill brought her life and times in Midway sharply

into focus after the images were professionally restored by local photographer, Jim Jenkins. Many of the individuals and places on Eliza's photographs have been identified and the "frozen moments of time" were added to the town's rich heritage. Eliza might not recognize the Midway of today, but I am sure she would like it.

### *The Old Gibson Home*

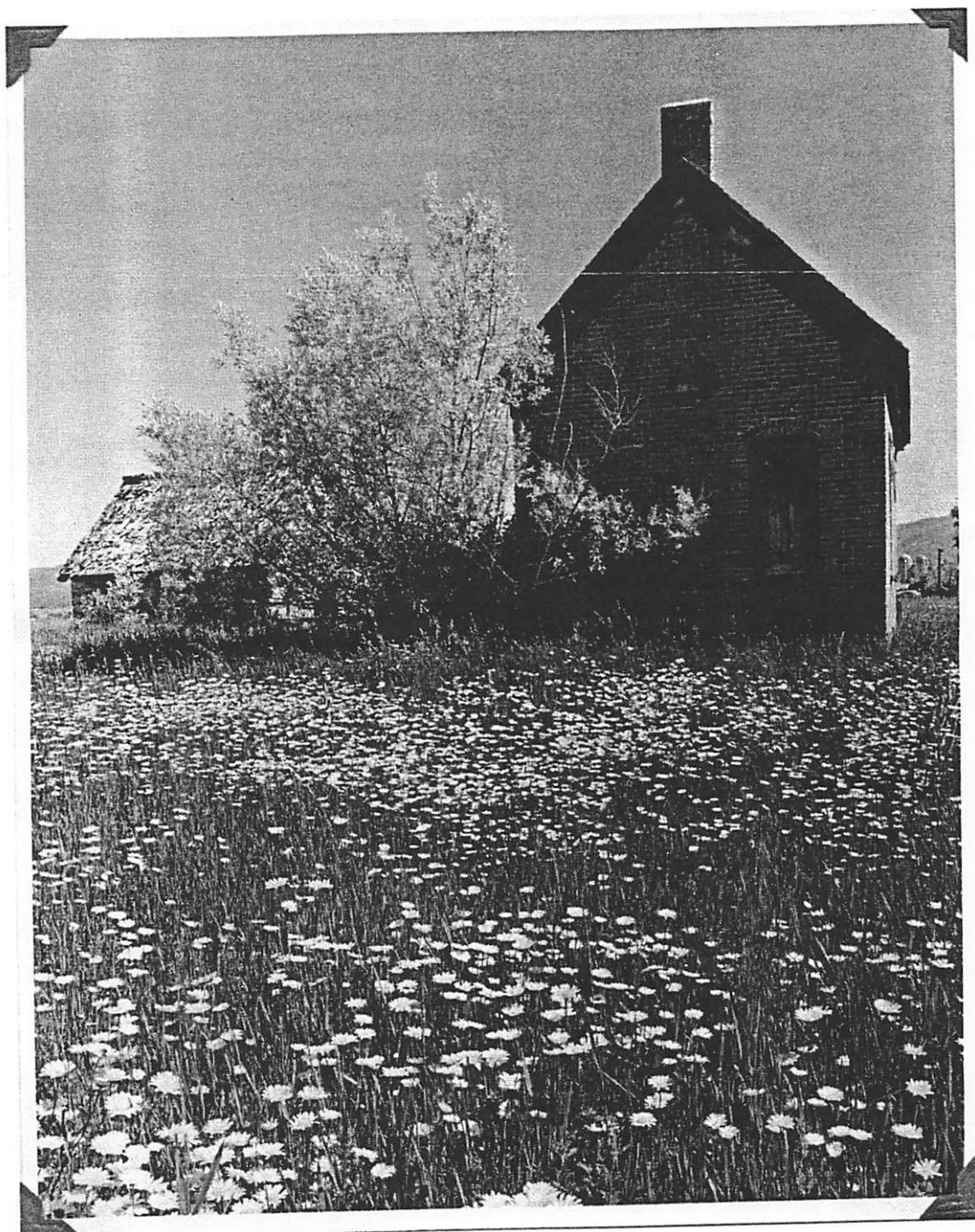
**Mine is a beautiful story of generations of families.**

**With strong square corners and warm fires,  
I am etched immortal on the minds of many.**

**Now walls are cold and you see me alone.  
Old now, I stand adorned with daisies.**

**Jim Jenkins**





*The original David Gibson home. Courtesy of Jim Jenkins.*





*My last day's catch. August 28/13 Mrs. R. E. Halliday*  
Mrs. Halliday and her trout in 1913. Courtesy of Jim Jenkins.